Summary

The purpose of this study is to provide an analysis of the ESS program as part of the Office of Education Accountability's 2007 research agenda. The research includes the following content:

- A review of best practices found in education literature;
- Analysis of staffing, funding, and expenditures within the program;
- Analysis of the program as implemented across the state, and;
- Recommendations for program improvement.

This study provides an in-depth analysis of a program that has significant potential to assist struggling students throughout the Commonwealth. Intervention with students struggling academically is an essential characteristics of high performing schools. Research staff observed a number of schools using ESS funds in ways consistent with best practices prescribed in the literature. However, this research found that large numbers of schools, especially at the middle and high school levels, are using ESS funds in ways that have not been proven to increase student academic achievement.

A major conclusion of this study is that the current ESS program is fragmented and lacks focus. The evidence presented in this report suggests that a more coordinated ESS program could enhance the ability of schools to foster student academic success. A more structured, data-driven program that targets academically-challenged students is possible and should be pursued. To accomplish this task, KDE needs to take a stronger administrative role that helps schools and districts link data, resources, and best practices.

A definitive need exists for extra school services. The intent of this report is to strengthen the ESS program, leading to a more efficient allocation of public funds. The recommendations focus on integrating existing programs and funding sources into a highly effective ESS program.

Data for this report come from a variety of quantitative and qualitative sources. OEA staff conducted an internet survey of schools and districts to gather more in-depth knowledge of ESS programs across the state. In addition, a series of site visits were conducted over the fall of 2007 to individual schools and districts. During these fact finding trips, researchers studied school level implementation of ESS, focusing on program strengths and barriers to success.

A review of relevant literature and presentation of best practices is found in Chapter 1. Existing KDE data on ESS program participation and funding was collected and is presented in Chapters 2 through 4. Additional data from the Student Information System (SIS) is analyzed in chapters 3 and 4. Chapter 4 reports the result of the school site visits. In the conclusion, Chapter 5 contains eight recommendations geared towards crafting a more comprehensive ESS program rooted in proven strategies that improve student performance.

Data reliability and validity issues do not permit analysis of ESS program quality state-wide. However, it was generally found that middle and high schools faced greater challenges than elementary schools providing effective ESS services. These challenges include:

- using data to identify students academic deficiencies,
- implementing evidence based intervention strategies,
- ensuring student attendance in programs,
- arranging services convenient to student schedules, and
- recruiting and hiring qualified staff.

In order to strengthen ESS, OEA makes the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1:

KDE should:
- Review the goals and expectations of the ESS program in light of current statutory requirements, Kentucky Board of Education (KBE) policy initiatives requiring assistance to students not meeting educational goals, and KDE's emerging Response to Intervention Program.
- Review the ESS administrative regulation to ensure that requirements tightly align with the program goals and reflect current understanding of best practices related to intervention with struggling students.
- Examine and use all existing authority provided under state and federal statute to assist schools failing to meet improvement goals.
- Ensure that regulation requirements do not impede the use of recommended practices. KDE should evaluate the effectiveness of the day time programs. If KDE finds that daytime programs are effective, they should eliminate the need for a waiver request. In addition, KDE should consider all delivery models that promote accessibility to ESS services.
- KDE should leverage existing and emerging systems and capabilities, such as KIDS, ILP, the proposed Kentucky Management Portal (KMP) and Kentucky Student Information System (SIS), to design better intervention programs, track and evaluate student performance and monitor program effectiveness.

Recommendation 2:

KDE should include in their review an analysis of all required data collections and the processes related to those collections. Any data required to be submitted should be aligned with recognized best practices, collected for a specific purpose, and useful for state and/or local evaluation of ESS programs.

Recommendation 3:

KDE should provide districts with comprehensive training and guidance related to required data and how such data can be used to evaluate the district's ESS programs. KDE should develop descriptive technical materials to support the collection of any ESS data determined to be necessary based upon the review conducted in Recommendation 2. These materials should be made available in an easily accessible format to districts.

Recommendation 4:

KDE should provide districts with guidance and training on the interpretation and use of data collected from all annual and interim assessments. Districts should be provided with information on how the results of the various assessments can be used to identify individual student needs and to place students in appropriate intervention programs, including ESS. KDE and the Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) should work together to ensure that the intervention strategies used for students as a result of Educational Planning and Assessment System (EPAS) scores are effective at increasing student readiness for college.

Recommendation 5:

KDE educational intervention and support initiatives should be coordinated within the Department so that program support is provided in a consolidated effort. Full agency collaboration is necessary so that districts receive a comprehensive range of research-based strategies and program assistance, from a single source. All documents, sources, data and information should be provided in an easily accessible manner, especially in newly emerging systems such as the SIS, KMP and KIDS.

Recommendation 6:

KDE should promote awareness among staff of all educational assistance programs, including ESS. KDE should require training of program support teams on all available funds and educational resources. Programs such as Highly Skilled Educators, Voluntary Partnership Assistance Team (VPATs), Scholastic Audit teams and other assistance teams should be well versed in the array of educational support programs available to districts.

Recommendation 7:

KDE, EPSB and CPE should collaborate in order to provide teachers, administrators and ESS instructors access to research-based strategies as they become available. These strategies can be taken from published research as well as research conducted by KDE, EPSB or CPE in Kentucky districts and schools. Research-based strategies should include additional intervention assistance to students not reaching learning goals as determined by all available data, including Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS), EPAS and other forms of assessment.

Recommendation 8:

KDE, EPSB and CPE should collaborate to ensure that preparation and professional development programs of teachers and administrators include training on effective and sound intervention strategies. These strategies should include measures to promote increased educational attainment at the postsecondary level, as required by the EPAS initiative.

School Improvement Plans (CSIPs), student referral forms, student referral records, student and staff attendance records, staff schedules, and individual records for randomly sampled ESS students.

In each school, staff observed one ESS program session. Site visits focused on after-school, daytime waiver, and before-school programs as these serve the greatest numbers of students in the state. In addition, one intersession program was observed. Appendix C contains a list of the questions asked in the structured interviews.